Kleindienst, Despite His Plea: 'I Don't Feel Guilty of Anything'

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Former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst said yesterday he doesn't feel he was guilty of the misdemeanor charge that he pleaded guilty to in 1974 during the Watergate scandal.

"I do not feel guilty of anything, felony or perjury," he said in a telephone interview.

He said he decided to plead guilty only because he was under intense physical and emotional stress during "the supercharged atmosphere of Watergate."

Newly disclosed documents from the Watergate special prosecution force, brought to light in a freedom of information lawsuit, show that prosecutor Leon Jaworski originally agreed to indict Kleindienst on eight felony counts of perjury and obstructing justice, then decided to let him plead guilty instead to the single misdemeanor count. Three Jaworski staff members resigned in protest.

Jaworski based his decision in part on the fact that Kleindienst had voluntarily provided information to Jaworski's predecessor, Archibald Cox, after Cox promised that his cooperation would be considered when the prosecutors decided what to do about Kleindienst's own case.

Kleindienst received a suspended sentence after pleading guilty to a charge of not testifying fully and accurately during Senate hearings when he denied there was White House pressure on the Justice Department to settle an antitrust suit against International Telephone & Telegraph Co.

White House tapes later revealed that President Nixon once called Kleindienst and ordered him to drop the ITT case.

Kleindienst said yesterday that at the Senate hearings—on his nomination to be Attorney General— he was asked only about White House pressure to settle the ITT case, and that Nixon's call came before settlement negotiations began. He said that if the senators had asked about White House pressure to drop the case, he would have asked Nixon either to let him tell about the telephone call or to withdraw his nomination.